



STATE OF MICHIGAN
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE AGENCY
LANSING



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

NANNETTE M. BOWLER
DIRECTOR

News Advisory

Contact: Name (517) 373-7394

4th annual Youth Leadership Forum to be held at MSU; GM commits \$20,000 to event that helps high school students with disabilities become tomorrow's leaders

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The world's largest automotive corporation reaffirmed their commitment to the future by supporting leadership training for youth with disabilities for the fourth consecutive year.

Lorna Utley, director of diversity initiatives and philanthropy at General Motors and president of the GM Foundation, said GM has contributed \$20,000 to the fourth Michigan Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF). The forum, to be held in June, is a leadership program for selected Michigan high school students with disabilities.

"General Motors is pleased to join its employees in supporting programs and organizations, such as the Heidi Van Arnen Michigan Youth Leadership Forum, that make a meaningful contribution to the quality of life in society," said Utley. "Through the forum, students with disabilities can promote their abilities as future leaders. The events continue to result in remarkable outcomes for the MYLF student delegates."

The fourth **Michigan Youth Leadership Forum will be held June 22-26 at Michigan State University.** It is a unique leadership program for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities and is coordinated by the Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns in partnership with other public and private agencies. The commission is administered through the Family Independence Agency.

"The youth leadership forum is a unique state government leadership training program for high school students," said Governor Jennifer Granholm. "The valued partnerships with the private sector lead to the development of our future leaders, who will be prepared to become integral, contributing members of our state."

The forum program is based on mentor relationships and developing leadership by example. Throughout the five-day forum, successful adults with disabilities serve as mentors in their roles as program presenters and small group leaders. They assist youth attending the forum to develop personal leadership plans and help them realize their ability, right, and obligation to contribute to society.

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Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns is comprised of 21 members appointed by the governor and staff persons based in Lansing. It acts as a resource and advocacy agency for Michigan citizens with disabilities.

"The Michigan Youth Leadership Forum is a successful program that gives students with disabilities the skills they will need to remove barriers, which they will encounter on their journey to become leaders in their communities," said Nannette Bowler, director of the Family Independence Agency. "General Motors continues their commitment to support programs that enhance the lives of Michigan citizens with disabilities."

Thirty-four students were selected to attend the training forum in June. They were selected through a competitive application process and will attend at no cost to their families.

"With GM as the primary corporate sponsor, successful Michigan Youth Leadership Forums were held in 2000, 2001, and 2002," said Lydia Graber, chairperson of the Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns. "These events helped student delegates achieve later successful outcomes in their communities including serving on local, state, and national boards; doing disability awareness presentations in schools; and returning as program assistants for this year's forum."

In addition to the General Motors contribution, state and local agencies and other private businesses have also made financial contributions to the June forum.

"Our commission is pleased to continue its ongoing partnership with General Motors," said Chris Hunter, acting director of the Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns. "Their continued strong support affirms our shared belief in the unlimited potential of Michigan youth with disabilities."

For more information about the Michigan Youth Leadership Forum, contact staffperson Margaret Heiser by phone (517) 334-8000, voice/TTY; email heiserm2@michigan.gov, or Internet www.mcdc-dodhh.org